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**Review of: Timothy Jacob-Owens, Multilingualism on Amrum. Language contact and variation 1839-1851**

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[1423] Timothy Jacob-Owens, *Multilingualism on Amrum. Language contact and variation 1839-1851* (Estrikken/Ålstråke 105). Kiel – Groningen (2017), Institut für Skandinavistik, Frisistik und Allgemeine Sprachwissenschaft – Stifting FFYRUG, 176 pp. ISBN978-3-954743-06-5.

Jacob-Owens' book on multilingualism on Amrum is framed within the field of historical sociolinguistics as the outcome of an investigation of language contact and variation between 1839 and 1851 on the North Frisian island of Amrum. Innovative in its approach is that the author rather than focussing only on a characterisation of linguistic phenomena in isolation from the speakers, explicitly incorporates extra-linguistic factors *sensu* Weinreich (1968). This is further operationalised within the scope of a rising field in sociolinguistics – the sociolinguistics of multilingualism – which is centred around a dialogical investigation of regional history and language change, instead of solely looking at the evolution of languages as closed constructs.

Another innovative aspect worth mentioning is the book's deliberate effort to detach itself from the so-called "standardisation perspective" in historical linguistics. Instead, it adopts a "from below" take on language contact and variation, by focussing on the analysis of a new corpus of informal letters of less-educated scribes from Amrum. As such, it addresses a recognizable gap in historical linguistics by both focussing on non-standard varieties and on a non-literary corpus.

After a brief introduction, the book starts with a theoretical background defining the central concepts used in the analysis. Language variation is understood as the interplay between changes in language and in society. The main focus of the definition of language contact is on the finding of interferences between languages and varieties of languages. Both definitions refer to the work of Weinreich (1968 and 1966). Yet, the theoretical chapter makes no reference to the most recent theoretical approaches developed in the areas of linguistics and multilingualism, such as usage-based linguistics (Tomasello 2003), the dynamic systems approach to second language acquisition (de Bot, Lowie & Verspoor 2007) or the framework of translanguaging (García 2009) to analyse the simultaneous use of several languages in communication. The theoretical background ends up by exploring the opposition between efforts of standardisation within one language and the natural occurring linguistic variation in everyday language use of speakers.

The following chapter offers a characterisation of the sociolinguistic ecology on Amrum as a space of dichotomy between the use of High German for writing and the Öömrang dialect as the main native language for oral communication between island inhabitants. The presence of North Frisian in Northern Germany and Low German as *lingua franca* in the communication with the outer world also characterised language use at the time. In this section, the core challenge of the book becomes visible. More precisely, it derives from the intersection between actual and conceptual oral and written language and between the language of official standard documents and everyday oral practices, to which access remains impossible and whose use can only be extrapolated through analysis of informal writings. Due to standardisation efforts, more documents can be found on standard languages than on non-standard varieties. Hence, the identification of Low Saxon, Öömrang dialectal as well as of North Frisian elements of the time is mostly done through comparison with other corpuses.

This is also the focus of the literature review chapter which presents eight studies examining "spoken language interference" (p. 15) of low educated speakers. Here it becomes clear that the author defines multilingualism as an assembly of linguistic interferences of several features of Germanic languages in Northern Germany at the time of the analysis. Defining multilingualism as linguistic interference arising from language contact is a rather reductive perspective, in particular in light of the newest trends in the investigation of multilingualism. As such, this particular choice could have been more critically discussed in the book. In this chapter, the author describes the study's approach, corpus and main findings, focussing on specific linguistic interferences, their attributed origin and classi

fication. The chapter provides a comprehensible overview of diatopically-marked variants across the low German speaking world of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. None of the reviewed studies focuses, however, specifically on the North Frisian region, a gap addressed in the Jacob-Owens' study.

The following chapter presents the data analysed and the method for analysis. The corpus used is rather small when compared to some of the other corpora presented in the literature review; it is composed of seventeen private letters from five members of a single family. Corpus analysis was done via tagging using the CATMA software. Linguistic features chosen for analysis are similar to those explored in the studies presented in the literature review and represent a traditional division of linguistic areas - orthography, phonology, morphology, syntax, lexis and pragmatics. A chance of using or developing new categories to explore sociolinguistic knowledge is left unexplored.

The methodology section is followed by a detailed description of the main results. Every linguistic phenomenon in the corpus identified as being the result of interference is thoroughly analysed and exemplified. In total, there are 150 examples of such phenomena in the book. The conclusion of the author is that the corpus "exhibits variation on all of the linguistic levels examined" (p. 93). This variation is attributed to two categories: supra-national and regional variation. Supra-national variation includes "changes in codified norms and spoken language variants, which are widely attested in (modern-day) speech" (p. 93). Regional variation includes "features of Northern German, many of which have arisen as a result of contact with Low Saxon, and diatopically-marked North-Frisian variants" (idem). Other regional variation phenomena occur through interference of the Öömrang dialect with German and the other variants. Due to emigration to the USA, some of the letters also contain interferences from English. All in all, a complex language ecology is presented and thoroughly exemplified, as well as contrasted with results from other studies zooming in on similar linguistic phenomena. However, the linguistic phenomena presented are always contrasted to modern day Standard (written) German and not treated as a language variety in itself.

Interestingly, the discussion summarises the main findings involved in language variation in the analysed corpus – changes in codified norms and language contact – in relation to extra-linguistic factors. Regarding codified norms, the corpus is marked by the presence of archaisms, explained both through exposure of the authors to Standard German and as an explicit way of creating a more formal and literary style in the letters. Language contact is directly linked to the forms of multilingualism playing a role on Amrum at the time and are characterised as interferences. These are also said to be a result of each individual author's linguistic repertoires and social background. Low German interference is found in the (male) sailors' letters as a result of Low German being the *lingua franca* at the time. English appears in the letters of the male scribes who travelled to the USA. In general, the frequency of non-standard features is higher in the female writers but no statistical significances can be inferred from the small dataset. A clear pattern can, however,

be found for the relation between year of birth and the use of non-standard features, with older scribes exhibiting more interferences in their writings. The author attempts to explain this disparity on the basis of differences in education of the scribes, in particular as regards exposure to standard German due to developments and reforms in the schooling on Amrum at the time.

The conclusions summarise the relevance of the study for the field of historical sociolinguistics and the role of analysing multilingualism for understanding language contact between co-occurring language varieties. The book also contains an overview of the corpus, the original letters as well as their transcriptions.

This book is an interesting example of an intersection between historical sociolinguistics and the sociolinguistics of multilingualism, attempting to analyse and explain language contact and variation on Amrum by including extra-linguistic factors. In fact, on more than one occasion, criticism is explicitly done to monolingually defined historical linguistics studies. Still, the study's main focus can also be defined as being monolingually oriented, as its main effort lies in the identification of interferences in relation to Standard German and their attribution to different languages or varieties. This suggests a conscious effort to separate and classify different linguistic chunks as being separate entities. What the writings often suggest, though, is that the scribes demonstrate fluid language practices and that their multilingual repertoires occur along a continuum in which elements from several languages and varieties are integrated. While acknowledging that this effort for language separation and qualification is somehow needed as a heuristic lens, a critical discussion of such approaches in light of recent developments within the field of multilingualism might have enriched the study.

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